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***Sex work advocacy in Aotearoa New Zealand:
Advocates' perspectives on
effecting positive change***

A research report presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Applied Social Work

at Massey University,
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ABSTRACT

Aotearoa New Zealand is in a unique position, being the only country to implement a model of full decriminalisation of sex work. This research explores the perspectives of sex work advocates on how they perceive their roles and the part they play in reducing the stigma associated with the sex industry. Given that Aotearoa New Zealand decriminalised sex work over a decade ago, the impact this legislation has had on the role of sex work advocacy was of particular interest. Strong radical feminist ideologies and moral judgement have succeeded in influencing international sex work legislation, including that of Sweden and Canada. However, this has not been the case for Aotearoa New Zealand. More robust research is needed to fully understand the effects these different legislative models have on the health and wellbeing of sex workers. This research project draws on a qualitative methodology and semi-structured interviews were conducted with three female sex work advocates, all of whom had lived experiences as sex workers prior to the law change, and have had significant involvement in sex work advocacy efforts, with upwards of seventeen years of advocacy experience each. The results of the study are largely consistent with the reviewed literature regarding the amount of time and effort involved in advocacy, as well as the importance of building relationships and alliances with key decision makers in order to facilitate positive change for sex workers. The results have also highlighted the positive effect decriminalisation has had on the lives and wellbeing of sex workers, and not the feared negative outcomes that oppositional groups had suggested. It was also noted that legislation alone is not enough to combat the stigma associated with the sex industry, but it does go a long way in protecting the basic rights of sex workers. So while legislative success has been achieved due to advocacy efforts, more effort is still required to counteract the existing and deeply entrenched myths surrounding sex work. With the literature detailing the Aotearoa New Zealand experience still being limited, this research contributes to the growing body of literature that advocates for the decriminalisation of sex work, with the hope of continuing to effect positive change for sex workers across the globe.

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And to all those who have suffered injustice, discrimination, stigma and abuse for not fitting into a socially acceptable mould, may you continue to add to the richness and diversity that make our communities interesting. We can only continue to strive for more inclusion, acceptance and tolerance. A massive heart felt thanks to those who fight for these basic human rights on a daily basis.

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